



INTRODUCTION

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The First World War mobilised millions in the implementation of political ideas in Europe. Civilians-turned-soldiers became an armed force accustomed to carrying out the orders of their officers. In turn, army officers, especially in the second half of the war, were forced into the deepening conflict between the no-longer-adequate political order and responsibility for their troops, exhausted by a war which had failed to produce the promised political results. Not only did some senior officers in East-Central Europe start wavering in their loyalty to their empires, but they also became involved in the revolutionary political processes that rippled over a large part of the old continent in different forms. In a society that was tired of war, they understood their role as guaranteeing the political and social order, and simultaneously had an impact on politics by supporting one group or another advocating a political idea. The role of armed men characterised by particular abilities of self-organisation in the chaotic situation at that time stood out after revolutions had destroyed empires.

In the revolutionary situation of the transfer of power,¹ many officers with military experience, even though troubled by the issue of their oath of loyalty, became involved in organising troops of states that were emerging in East-Central Europe under slogans for radical change, and started defending the new political regimes and the influence of borders designated by them in military conflicts which were still far from over in 1918. Both the process of the transfer of power and the active role that the army played lasted until at least 1921. On one hand, in that period it was clear that without the army the new political leaders were not going to achieve the goals they had proclaimed to their supporters. On the other hand, the eternal issue of the depoliticisation of the army and its control, which was widely discussed by Niccolò Machiavelli as far back as the 16th century, was becoming increasingly relevant. With the stabilisation of the new regimes in parts of the continent affected by revolutionary change, the issue of how to bring the army, and especially ambitious officers, under civilian control was a fundamental challenge. In different East-Central European countries, the challenge was dealt with in very different ways.

In our collection of papers, the role of the armed forces in the political process, paying special attention to attempts at the transfer of power in the region, is dealt with by the example of two states, Poland and Lithuania. It is well known that in the interwar period, the Vilnius region was a source of conflict between these countries which was not solved, despite the efforts of the League of Nations. Because of Vil-

¹ We were encouraged to use the term by the research of Tilly, cf.: TILLY, Charles. *European Revolutions, 1492-1992*. Oxford and Cambridge, MA, 1993, pp. 15-16.